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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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SOVIET-SCANDINAVIAN RELATIONS STRAINED

Summary

The USSR's relations with the Scandinavian countries have recently been more troubled than they have been for many years. The release of a Swedish government commission's report on Soviet submarine intrusions has generated sharp polemical exchanges between Moscow and the major Scandinavian governments. The Soviets have tried to use the recent visit of the Finnish President to Moscow and CPSU General Secretary Andropov's proposals for a Nordic nuclear weapons-free zone (NNWFZ) to divert attention to other Nordic security concerns. Recent statements by the Swedish Prime Minister supporting a nuclear free zone may have reassured Moscow that relations will improve.

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The Swedish Submarine Report

Relations between the Scandinavian governments and the USSR were immediately affected by the release on 26 April of a Swedish government report alleging numerous and provocative violations of Sweden's territorial waters by Soviet submarines. The Swedish government recalled its ambassador from Moscow, lodged a formal protest with the Soviet government, and cancelled all planned visits by Swedish political and military officials to the USSR. Nordic defense ministers meeting in Bergen the day after the report's release acknowledged publicly that the conclusions to be drawn from the report represented a threat to all the Nordic countries. A scheduled visit to Moscow by a Danish parliamentary delegation was cancelled, and Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, and Icelandic diplomats were instructed not to attend May Day festivities in Moscow.

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The Soviets reacted swiftly, contending in a TASS article on 27 April that the release of the report had been intended to prompt an increase in armaments expenditures by Sweden and to aggravate tension in the Nordic region to NATO's advantage.

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This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] the Current Support Division, Office of Soviet Analysis. Comments and questions are welcome and may be addressed to Chief, Europe Branch [redacted]

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The Swedes reportedly would have preferred to avoid a political confrontation with the Soviets, but felt compelled by the persistence of reports of submarine intrusions, and perhaps by frustration at their failure to demonstrate conclusively the presence of intruding submarines, to take a firm stand. According to assessments by the US Embassy in Stockholm, the Soviets' denials of guilt had no impact and bilateral relations became chilled. [Redacted]

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On 23 May, the Soviets acknowledged in a Pravda article that the issue was no longer merely a bilateral problem. The article rejected recent claims by Oslo of violations of Norwegian waters by Soviet submarines and attacked the Danish Prime Minister for his criticism of Soviet activities. Pravda attributed the outcry to an indoctrination of Scandinavian public opinion by Washington and other "NATO-ites" intent on stemming the tide of anti-INF sentiment in Western Europe. [Redacted]

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Moscow's denials continued to fall on deaf ears. Nordic leaders rebutted Pravda's arguments and renewed their criticism of Soviet military activities in the region. Arbatov publicly denied he had impugned Sweden's neutrality and leadership, but the Swedish press claimed that a second Soviet official had made similar remarks to a member of the government commission. Riksdag Deputy Carl Bildt, who was under criticism for allegedly having discussed the submarine report and Swedish-Soviet relations during a trip to the US in early May, reportedly had been approached while the commission was still at work by a Soviet diplomat in Stockholm. The Soviet tried to persuade the Swedes to discontinue their hunts for submarines, a Swedish paper reported on 21 May, asserting that submarine intrusions would continue. [Redacted]

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The next major Soviet comment on the Swedish submarine report appeared timed to exploit the controversy surrounding Bildt's trip to the US and his debate with Prime Minister Palme over Sweden's relations with the USSR and the US. On 2 June, the Soviets in Izvestiya again accused the US of instigating the Swedish charges and attacked Secretary Weinberger for his claim the week before to the Norwegian press that the USSR was expanding its military presence in the Nordic region. [Redacted]

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The Nordic Nuclear Weapons-Free Zone Proposal

In the midst of this polemic, the Finns in late May celebrated the 20th anniversary of their proposal for a Nordic nuclear weapons-free zone. Palme reaffirmed Stockholm's interest in such a zone in a 1 June address in Helsinki. He asserted that submarine intrusions had not affected the fundamental position of the Nordic countries on political and security questions, but for the first time he called specifically for the Baltic Sea to be formally included in a nuclear-free zone. [redacted]

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The Soviets have long encouraged the idea of such a zone, hoping to make the de facto nuclear-free status of the region de jure also in wartime. Sweden and Finland as neutral countries have no nuclear weapons. Norway and Denmark decided in 1953 to forbid the stationing of foreign troops on their soil in peacetime, and in 1957 to prohibit nuclear arms on their territory in peacetime. The NATO obligations of the Norwegians and Danes would, of course, require suspension of those prohibitions in time of war. [redacted]

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As a more immediate political objective, the Soviets have advocated the zone in order to ingratiate themselves with the Nordic governments that support it and to put NATO-member countries in the region on the defensive. Moscow has been hampered in its efforts to exploit the issue, however, by its refusal to share the obligations of an agreement. The Nordics have hoped in particular that a nuclear-free zone would encompass the Kola Peninsula, where the presence of major Soviet nuclear submarine bases and other military forces has long been of considerable concern. [redacted]

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In June 1981, in an apparent attempt to stir anti-nuclear sentiment in the Nordic region and elsewhere in Western Europe in the wake of NATO's INF decision, President Brezhnev said that the USSR was prepared to pledge not to use nuclear weapons against countries belonging to a Nordic nuclear-weapons free zone and offered for the first time to consider "measures applying to our own territory in the region adjoining the nuclear-free zone." Although his phrasing implied that no Soviet territory would be included in the zone itself, Nordic governments were encouraged and said they awaited more specific proposals by Moscow. [redacted]

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In March 1983, Soviet General Staff arms control spokesman General Chervov said publicly that the USSR might, in negotiating a Nordic nuclear weapons-free zone, consider withdrawing its six ballistic missile submarines from the Baltic. On 10 May, evidently in an attempt to calm the initial outcry over the submarine report, Andropov reiterated Brezhnev's offer, adding that measures the Soviets might consider regarding their own territory adjoining the zone could be "quite substantial." He made no reference to Chervov's idea and did not allude specifically to the Baltic. [redacted]

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On 6 June, at a dinner for visiting Finnish President Koivisto, Andropov enlarged upon his 10 May initiative to indicate for the first time Moscow's willingness to discuss giving nuclear-free status to the Baltic Sea. The timing of the speech, five days after Palme's reference to the Baltic in Helsinki, suggests that the Soviets intended the initiative primarily to blunt the impact of the submarine report and improve Moscow's image in the Nordic region. [redacted]

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Norway and Denmark reacted cautiously, claiming Andropov's offer was too ambiguous to be meaningful. Finland's response was positive, as was Sweden's more reserved reaction. Palme has subsequently repeated his call for such a zone before the North Atlantic Assembly on 13 June and elsewhere, and underlined the need for the Baltic to be included.

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It is unlikely that the Soviets would agree to do more than discuss nuclear-free status for the Baltic Sea. Any agreement on a nuclear-free Baltic would, for example, have to include the six G-class diesel-powered ballistic missile submarines based there, although these are aging and may be retired soon anyway. The removal of nuclear-armed torpedoes and antiship missiles from other Soviet submarines and surface ships in the Baltic would be difficult to verify, and could be reversed quickly. Moscow would refuse to make any serious concessions concerning the Kola Peninsula.

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Outlook

The Soviets clearly hope that the submarine issue will disappear and that broader issues such as the Nordic nuclear weapons-free zone and concern about INF will come to predominate in Moscow's relations with the Nordic countries. In the Soviets' treatment of Koivisto during his visit--at which time he extended the 1948 Soviet-Finnish Mutual Assistance Treaty for another 20 years--it was evident that Moscow considers its relationship with Helsinki to be an example it would like other Nordic governments to emulate. On 13 June, Pravda hailed Soviet-Finnish relations as "the prototype not only of peaceful, proper ties between states with different social systems and ideologies, but of relations of real friendship, mutual respect, and mutual trust."

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Palme's recently more active promotion of the Nordic nuclear weapons-free zone proposal may reassure Moscow that it can begin again to portray itself as the champion rather than a violator of Swedish-style neutrality. The Soviets have also been heartened by the Danish parliament's vote in late May to call for postponement of NATO INF deployments and to demand that British and French nuclear forces be considered at Geneva. Pravda on 2 June hailed the vote as "a decision in favor of Europe, peace, and cooperation."

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As INF deployment dates approach and Moscow's appeals to West European opinion become more intense, the Soviets can be expected to cultivate a benign and cooperative image in the Nordic region even more assiduously. A more specific offer with regard to a nuclear weapons-free zone or some other initiative within the next several months cannot be discounted, although it is unlikely the Soviets will consider measures that would seriously affect their military posture. Soviet commentary will continue to highlight visits by US officials and US statements on Nordic policies as alleged examples of US and NATO pressure on these countries.

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